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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**Effects of Counter-Insurgency Efforts in Fallujah
During the Spring and Summer of 2004**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: Effects of Counter-Insurgency Efforts in Fallujah during the spring and summer of 2004

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Thesis: Early Counter-Insurgency (COIN) efforts in Fallujah during the spring and summer of 2004, especially the formation of the Fallujah Brigade (FB) and the follow-on negotiations with the insurgent leadership in Jordan, set the necessary conditions for the success of ensuing COIN efforts in Al Anbar province.

Discussion: Initial coalition interaction mistakes with the local populace, coupled with ill-advised policies by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), contributed to the growth of the insurgency in Iraq, especially in Fallujah. Consequently the United States had to fight two major battles in the city, starting with Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE in April 2004, which caused widespread insurrection in Iraq and almost led to the demise of political efforts to build a new democratic government in the country. Coalition Forces (CF) created the FB out of desperation in the aftermath of the unilateral ceasefire as a viable alternative that would allow it to disengage from Fallujah. However, the FB failed to deliver on expected results, and was ultimately disbanded by October 2004. Nevertheless, the creation of the FB was an important step in the coalition reconciliation process with the Sunni Arabs despite its failure, as it demonstrated the willingness of the coalition to listen to and address Sunni concerns. This willingness was further demonstrated during the Marines' negotiations with the leadership of Former Regime Elements (FRE) in Amman, Jordan, during the summer of 2004. In essence, the seeds of the Al Anbar Awakening and the Sunni reconciliation with CF were sown in the spring and summer of 2004.

Conclusion: The FB initiative and the Amman negotiations with the FRE leadership were crucial first steps for CF to open a dialogue with disenfranchised former regime elements, and set the conditions for the creation of follow-on successful initiatives in Al Anbar province.

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Introduction

The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq led to the rise of the suppressed Shi'a majority to power, and effectively marginalized the Sunni minority that had ruled Iraq for centuries. However, the Sunnis did not consider themselves defeated, and believed that they would eventually regain power. The coalition's initial mistakes in dealing with the local populace, coupled with the CPA's ill-advised policies, contributed to the growth of the insurgency in Iraq, especially in Fallujah.

The First Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) created the Fallujah Brigade (FB) in the spring of 2004 as a last ditch effort to drive a wedge between Former Regime Elements (FRE) and religious fundamentalists backed by Foreign Fighters (FF) in the restive city of Fallujah. The follow-on negotiations with the Sunni insurgent leadership in Amman, Jordan, in the summer of 2004 further opened the lines of communication with the insurgency. Despite the early demise of these Counter-Insurgency (COIN) efforts, these experiments had significant and lasting effects on the success of follow-on COIN efforts in Al Anbar province.

Background

The Sunnis considered the city of Fallujah, which was untouched by the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, to be their bastion of resistance. Fallujah had a reputation of a "frontier town bordering an open desert that attracted outcasts and criminals."¹ In fact, Fallujans have always disliked and distrusted foreigners, including any Iraqi strangers not from the city. The people of Fallujah are also tribal and more religious than the rest of the Sunnis in Al Anbar province. Over the years, the city has been a hotbed for Sunni extremism, such as the Wahabi and Salafi sects.

The city Imams have traditionally wielded just as much power as the tribal Sheikhs, and Fallujah was known as the “city of a hundred mosques.”² Additionally, tribal justice requires a delicate balance of reprisals and restitution, where acts of vengeance and retribution are the norm for local residents who strongly believe in defending their honor and shunning humiliation. Hence, Coalition Forces’ (CF) perceived transgressions in Fallujah contributed to the people’s defiant reaction against them in early 2003.

Initial Interaction Mistakes

Soldiers from the US Army 82nd Airborne Division were the first coalition troops to enter Fallujah in late April 2003. On 28 April 2003, Saddam Hussein’s birthday, U.S. soldiers accidentally shot and killed fifteen men, women, and children, and injured dozens more after a mob protest at a school occupied by a platoon of paratroopers. The shootings further inflamed the Fallujans against U.S. occupation, and resulted in reprisals and daily revenge attacks against U.S. forces in the form of shootings and improvised explosive devices. By the fall of 2003, Fallujah had no effective local Iraqi Police (IP) or Iraqi Army (IA) presence. Over the following months, Fallujans increased their attacks against U.S. forces, which further isolated the city and prevented it from benefiting from U.S. reconstruction projects. These attacks were also galvanized by U.S. policy decisions about the former IA and Baath party membership that essentially planted the seeds of the Sunni insurgency across Iraq.

The Seeds of the Insurgency

On 10 May 2003, a few weeks after the fall of Baghdad, President Bush appointed Ambassador L. Paul Bremer as his envoy to Iraq. Bremer administered the newly-formed CPA, and had “broad policy making and budgetary authority to build the new Iraq.”³ Bremer made two very important decisions at the outset of his administration: First, he banned senior members of

the Baath party, which was Saddam's ruling party before the invasion, from holding government positions. Second, he dissolved the IA. The impact of these two decisions cannot be underestimated. In essence, most Sunni Arabs belonged to the Baath party and held the preponderance of Iraqi government jobs; and the implementation of these new policies inevitably led to the firing of more than 30,000 Baath party members from government ministry positions, and about 100,000 members of Iraq's various intelligence services.⁴

At the same time, the IA also employed thousands of Sunni officers and senior Baathists, whose main residence was in the city of Fallujah. In fact, U.S. officials estimated that more than 43,000 FRI live in and around Fallujah.⁵ Therefore, Bremer's decisions had the effect of putting thousands of disenfranchised Sunnis out of work and further alienating a section of the population that blamed the U.S. for most of its problems. These decisions directly contributed to the rise of the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.

Growing Insurgency

On 14 February 2004, just after two Iraqi National Guard (ING) battalions were deployed in and around Fallujah, insurgents associated with Abu Musab al Zarqawi (AMZ) assaulted the main police station in the city and killed twenty-three policemen while freeing seventy-five prisoners. This incident, which was later known as the Valentine's Day Massacre, signaled a shift in the leadership and make-up of the insurgency in Fallujah from the Baathists and FRI to religious fundamentalists and FF, to include members of Al Qai'da in Iraq (AQI) such as AMZ.

This power shift in the insurgency leadership coincided with a transition in coalition troops in Fallujah and Al Anbar province from the soldiers of the 82nd Airborne Division to the Marines of I MEF. The Marines envisioned a different approach than the Army to deal with the

insurgency in Fallujah. Instead of mounted patrols, Marines from the Second Battalion, First Marine Regiment (2/1) immediately started foot patrols in the city.⁶ The idea was to show persistent coalition presence in Fallujah and restore security and the rule of law, while hoping that the residents would ultimately reject the insurgents. However, the fact that no IA or IP units participated in these patrols created the opposite effect, as residents openly supported continued insurgent attacks against 2/1 patrols in Fallujah during the next few days. Unfortunately, all efforts by the Marines to include IA and local IP units in their patrols failed, because the residents of Fallujah viewed the Americans as evil occupiers.

The Blackwater Ambush

On 31 March 2004, insurgents attacked and killed four U.S. contractors from the Blackwater Corporation who were driving on the main highway in Fallujah. The anger of the local population towards the coalition was immediately manifested through mobs of people burning, mutilating, and dragging the bodies of the four American contractors through the streets of Fallujah and hanging them on a bridge. Footage of the mutilation was broadcast all over the world.

I MEF had a plan for Fallujah that incorporated the basic COIN principles. As such, the Marines would gradually move into Fallujah on foot patrols and establish combat outposts in the city in coordination with Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). In the aftermath of the Blackwater killings, Lieutenant General James T. Conway, I MEF Commander, stated that “revenge is a dish best served cold,” and believed that rushing into Fallujah did not make any strategic sense.⁷ However, the political and international significance of the Blackwater killings was considerable, as the prestige and resolve of the United States was on the line. The CPA and Coalition Joint Task Force 7 (CJTF-7) leadership in Baghdad regarded the MEF response to the Blackwater

killings in Fallujah as “too slow...allowing insurgent and terrorist elements ample time to prepare defenses and initiate a propaganda campaign.”⁸ As such, both the White House and the CPA wanted swift and immediate retaliation. On 2 April 2004, CJTF-7 issued the order to initiate offensive operations against Fallujah, and dubbed the operation VIGILANT RESOLVE.

Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE

The major elements required for COIN success did not exist in Fallujah in early April 2004. I MEF had just assumed command of the Al Anbar province Area of Operation (AO), and did not have any established relationships with the local population. Additionally, there were no effective local ISF anywhere in the AO, and the IP inside Fallujah were mostly collaborating with the insurgents. Finally, intelligence collection and cultural understanding of local politics and sensitivities were barely in the developmental stages. Additionally, a messy urban battle would have most certainly lead to inevitable civilian deaths. However, the hurried assault timeline did not allow enough time to evacuate all civilians from the city. Furthermore, the CPA did not gain Iraqi Government Council (IGC) support for the assault, and there was no deliberate effort to mount an effective Information Operation (IO) campaign. Finally, the rush to take the city meant that the Marines would have to unilaterally provide security and run local services because of the lack of Iraqi public support. Therefore, I MEF was not properly prepared to execute the CJTF-7 order on 2 April.

The assault on Fallujah started on 6 April with two Marine infantry battalions (Bn), augmented by elements of the 36th Iraqi Commando Bn. The intensity of the fight led I MEF to move four additional Marine Battalions from Western Al Anbar province to Fallujah, which was

an enormous risk considering that the western desert of Al Anbar province would be left unsecured for insurgents to roam freely near the border with Syria and Jordan. Within the next three weeks, insurgents in rural areas all over Al Anbar province ambushed coalition supply routes and subsequently caused massive supply shortages for coalition forces all over Iraq.

Despite all efforts to minimize civilian casualties, the dense urban environment made it inevitable that several civilians were killed or injured, including women and children. The insurgents had a well planned IO propaganda effort in the city that magnified the sensation of civilian casualties. Al Jazeera television had a reporter inside the city broadcasting live footage during the battle. The Al Jazeera reporting was one-sided in support of the insurgents, and tended to magnify civilian destruction and casualties. For example, when Marines properly responded to insurgent attacks originating from a mosque, Al Jazeera only televised the footage of coalition air strikes against the mosque. These daily broadcasts from inside Fallujah galvanized public opinion all over the world against the coalition. The Arab media likened the Fallujah resistance to the Palestinian Intifada against the Israelis. Meanwhile, I MEF and CJTF-7 made minimum efforts to refute the Al Jazeera allegations, as they could have shown recorded surveillance and reconnaissance footage and invite the world press to report from the front lines. Consequently, the world press was forced to rely on Al Jazeera reporting, which continuously broadcasted footage of civilian casualties and destruction of civilian homes in Fallujah.

The effect of the insurgent propaganda campaign through Al Jazeera was significantly more devastating and powerful than the coalition military assault on the city. The perceived coalition killings of civilians in the city inflamed Iraqi public opinion in support of the insurgency. Several members of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) threatened to resign in protest and the upcoming transition of power from the CPA to the IGC was in serious jeopardy.

Consequently, the CPA and the White House were subjected to tremendous local and international public opinion pressure to stop the assault on Fallujah. Hence on 9 April 2004, CJTF-7 ordered I MEF to unilaterally stop the assault on Fallujah, less than a week after it issued the order to initiate offensive operations against the city. I MEF had limited options to deal with situation in Fallujah, and thus the formation of a local security force in the city became an attractive alternative option.

The Fallujah Brigade Initiative

President George W. Bush wanted other options to deal with the situation in Fallujah.⁹ The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had recently established the Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS), with Mohammed Abdullah Al Shehwani as interim director. The CIA's representative at the MEF suggested to Lieutenant General Conway that former Iraqi Generals living in Fallujah create a Fallujah Brigade (FB) in the city comprised of FRE soldiers and disenfranchised insurgents. The idea was to turn over security in the city to the FB and create a wedge in the insurgency between the FRE and the FF.

I MEF considered the FB initiative a viable alternative that would allow it to disengage from Fallujah.¹⁰ The FB was armed with weapons that were mostly recovered from weapons caches, and I MEF paid its salaries. In return, I MEF expected the FB to stop insurgent attacks on the coalition convoys in the city, find and turn over the criminals involved with the Blackwater murders, expel foreign fighters from Fallujah, and recover all the heavy weapons.¹¹

Shehwani appointed General Jassim Mohammed Salih, a former IA Republican Guard Commander, as the first FB Commander. The White House and the CPA immediately objected

to Salih's appointment due to pressure from the Iraqi Shi'as and the Kurds, who feared the return of FRE to power. General Salih was subsequently replaced by Colonel Mohammad Latif, a former IA intelligence officer who lived in Baghdad, and I MEF started withdrawing from Fallujah by the end of April. The FB was ultimately disbanded by the Iraqi government and I MEF in September 2004 after its leaders failed to deliver on expected coalition demands.

Demise of the Fallujah Brigade

The FB initiative was in many ways doomed, as I MEF experienced strong internal and external opposition to this COIN experiment. Internally, the Ground Combat Element, especially the First Marine Division (1st MarDiv) and the First Regimental Combat Team (RCT-1) staff, expressed strong reservations about arming and dealing with insurgents with whom they were still engaged in combat inside Fallujah. Additionally, the fact that the Marines had to withdraw from the positions they painstakingly gained inside the city during a week of fighting and cede them to the FB was difficult to accept. As such, there was a general feeling of betrayal among the staff, as they viewed the FB with great suspicion. External to I MEF, most of the Shi'a and Kurdish members of the IGC were against its formation, as they feared the return of FRE and the implication of forming a perceived local militia on the development of the ISF. In turn, they pressured the CPA to halt this experiment. At the same time, the CPA felt blindsided by the creation of the FB, and especially by the appointment of General Salih as the brigade commander. The U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, shared the reaction of the CPA by naively stating that Salih "looks just like Saddam."¹² Consequently, General Salih was immediately replaced by Colonel Latif.

The appointment of Latif was a mistake that was counter to basic COIN principles. A key line of effort during COIN operations in an urban environment is the establishment of a Host Nation (HN) security force with strong effective leadership in order to secure and control the population and prevent the insurgent's freedom of movement, especially in a former authoritarian country like Iraq.¹³ A well-led HN security force that has the support of the local population can isolate the insurgents from the population and conduct information engagements to emphasize local government and coalition successes and expose insurgent propaganda.¹⁴ Additionally, the HN security force needs to create a secure physical and psychological environment and provide continuous security for the local population. The replacement of General Salih, an experienced local commander who arguably had considerable influence inside Fallujah, with Colonel Latif, a non-Fallujah resident who had no command experience and little influence inside the city, during the initial formation of the FB deprived it from an invaluable local leadership. As such, the distant FB leadership was doomed to failure, as it was unable to secure and control the population and prevent FF freedom of movement inside the city.

Additionally, the incorrect implementation of COIN tenants that originally led to the creation of the FB resulted in its eventual demise. One of the main goals for the creation of the FB was to drive a wedge between the FRE and the religious fundamentalists backed by the FF. However, the FRE were eventually marginalized by the religious fundamentalists and FF who had become more powerful in Fallujah during that time. As such, Fallujah became a safe haven and a hotbed for the insurgent and criminal activity that spread across Iraq during the summer of 2004.

Another key consideration during COIN operations in an urban environment is the requirement to maintain forward presence with the population along with the HN security force.

CF forward presence with the ISF would reassure the members of that force that they have strong backing against insurgents. It would also ensure the security of the local population and further isolate them from the insurgents. Local conditions during the creation of the FB did not allow I MEF to establish forward presence despite pressing the FB leadership for joint patrols at the time.

The Specialized Special Forces

During the summer of 2004, the FB became irrelevant inside Fallujah, as the FF and religious fundamentalists effectively controlled the city and sidelined the FB. The FB soldiers either refused to fight the FF and religious fundamentalists or were actually working closely with them. The INIS director proposed to the I MEF commander the integration of a battalion formed from non-Fallujan former Iraqi soldiers into the FB to reduce the influence of FF on the Brigade and effectively re-invigorate its original mission. However, the FB leadership refused to allow the new battalion into the city, branding it as a Kurdish and Shi'a incursion into Fallujah. I MEF decided to house the new battalion, called the Specialized Special Forces (SSF), on the U.S. Marine camp just outside of Fallujah. I MEF trained and equipped the SSF, which ended up working closely with CF across Al Anbar province, especially in Fallujah during Operation AL FAJR in November 2004. The members of the SSF were housed outside of Fallujah and hence they did not succumb to the influence and control of the insurgents in the city. Additionally, the SSF were trained and deployed under close CF supervision, which led to the creation of strong bonds of friendship and respect with the Marines. The SSF were the first effective indigenous force that served successfully alongside the Marines in Al Anbar province in 2004. The proper implementation of the lessons learned from the FB experiment led to the successful integration

of the SSF with CF. The limited success of the SSF led to the use of similar techniques to train, equip, and deploy ISF and local indigenous forces during the following years.

Lessons Learned from the FB Experiment

The factors listed above that led to the demise of the FB and the limited success of the SSF were among the main lessons learned that were implemented to shape follow-on successful COIN operations in Al Anbar. Most importantly, one of the primary tasks listed in the COIN manual during the clear-hold-build phase is to “provide continuous security for the local populace, eliminate insurgent presence, reinforce political primacy, enforce the rule of law, and rebuild local HN institutions.”¹⁵ In order to do so, the coalition and the IIG needed to address the causes of the insurgency and to obtain some level of Sunni support and cooperation with CF and legitimize their perception of the IIG.

For the Sunnis, the main causes of their grievance were the CPA policy of de-Baathification and the dissolving of the old IA. Consequently, they did not consider the IIG and the IA to be legitimate. The FB initiative was meant to redress some of the Sunni grievances that fueled the insurgency by allowing them to provide for their own security and to eventually participate in the new ISF. Unfortunately, the Iraqi political environment in the spring and summer of 2004 was not ripe for resolving this dispute, and that initiative failed. However, I MEF got another chance to divide and reduce the Sunni insurgency during the summer of 2004.

The Amman July Surprise

In the summer of 2004, the Sunni Arab insurgent leadership initiated talks with I MEF in Amman, Jordan. The MEF commander continued to believe that the insurgency could be fractured and that FRE could be persuaded to work with the Marines. These talks were a continuation of the FB initiative, which attempted to persuade FRE that the Marines were willing to listen to their concerns and negotiate a settlement to the ongoing insurgency. The FB initiative, despite its unsuccessful implementation, was crucial in opening the lines of communications and developing initial bonds of trust between the Marines and the insurgency, in addition to driving a limited initial wedge between the FRE and the hard-line fundamentalists in Al Anbar province.

As a matter of fact, it was the insurgent leadership, under the command of Former Iraqi Republican Guard commander Lieutenant General Ra'ad al-Hamdani, who approached the Marines during an economic conference in Amman, Jordan, on 19 July 2004. Lieutenant General Ra'ad presented a paper that contained three non-negotiable points that "Iraq should be viewed as one country, the American occupation should be ended, and that the wealth of Iraq should benefit all Iraqis."¹⁶ Additionally, Ra'ad proposed the formation of a Desert Protection Force (DPF) for Al Anbar province, which would be led by former officers of the Iraqi Army, and its members recruited from the various tribes of the province.¹⁷ Lieutenant General Ra'ad strongly believed that Bremer's decision to "disband the former Iraqi Army was a mistake that fueled the insurgency and transformed the American liberation of Iraq into the American occupation of Iraq."¹⁸ The reality was that the FRE feared the increased influence of Iran inside Iraq, and considered working with the American as the lesser of evils in order to keep Iranian influence at bay in Iraq.

The creation of the DPF would essentially overturn Bremer's decision, and allow the former Iraqi officers and soldiers to eventually serve in the new Iraqi Army. In return, the FRE would work with the Marines and turn their guns against the hard-line insurgents. However, the CPA and the U.S. administration were not willing to reverse the policy that Bremer already set in motion. In fact, the CPA was unwilling to talk to the insurgents and refused to admit that its policies created and fueled the Sunni insurgency. Consequently, the CPA and the IIG were against any negotiations with the FRE and the U.S. State Department effectively barred any further talks in Jordan.

One of the important outcomes of the Amman conference was it slightly transformed the Sunni perception of CF presence in Iraq, and laid the foundation for the establishment of an enduring long-term relationship based on trust. As a matter of fact, a Japanese businessman who attended the July Amman conference gave an emotional speech about "becoming the friends of America", as he told the attendees:

"You can trust the Americans. When they say they'll work with you, they don't lie. They helped rebuild my country. They said they were going rebuild Japan after the war. No one believed them, but they did. We expected them to occupy our country and take everything we own, and leave us destroyed, but they didn't, and now they're one of our best friends."¹⁹

That speech had an immeasurable impact on the Iraqi audience that no other American could have made, as it showed a vision of the potential gains that the Sunnis could have by working with the Americans against AQI and the FF.²⁰ Colonel Michael M. Walker, I MEF's Civil Affairs Group Commanding Officer who spearheaded the Amman conference, made the following remarks:

"The lights were going on that maybe the road out of this thing is with the Americans, instead of with Al Qai'da, and Al Qai'da was Frankenstein's monster. They brought them

in, thinking they were going to be able to control them, and they were not. They lost control of the beast, and Al Qai'da started taking over them."²¹

The AL SAHWA movement (aka the Awakening) evolved as a result of the FB initiative and the Amman dialogue with FRE, which were important first steps in the coalition reconciliation process with the Sunni Arabs despite their failure, as they demonstrated the willingness of the coalition to listen to and address Sunni concerns.

Effects on Follow-on COIN Efforts in Al Anbar

In retrospect, both the FB initiative and the Amman July surprise were crucial first steps for U.S. forces to open a dialogue with disenfranchised FRE, which eventually led to reconciliation with tribal sheikhs and Sunni leaders in 2007. The FRE the Marines faced in Al Anbar in 2004 were insurgents with legitimate concerns. They were not terrorists, unlike the hard-line fundamentalists associated with AQI. Additionally, the creation of the FB allowed the CPA to proceed with plans for the transfer of sovereignty on June 30th, and afforded I MEF the opportunity to disengage its forces from Fallujah and prepare for the inevitable second military assault on the city in November 2004, dubbed Operation AL FAJR (aka PHANTOM FURY).

I MEF considered both initiatives as essential means to reduce attacks against the Marines and address the root of the Sunni insurgency. However, the politicians in Baghdad and Washington were effectively operating in a bubble, as they were isolated from events on the ground and unwilling to reverse policies that fueled the Sunni insurgency. Initial US policy in Iraq was the source of the insurgency. The former IA was a proud institution that had proved itself during the war with Iran in the 1980s, and most Iraqis highly respected it. I MEF's experiment with the FB, and the follow-on summer negotiations in Amman, essentially initiated

a reversal of early U.S. policy towards the FRE and signaled the willingness of the Marines to give them a role in the new IA.

The three key groups in Al Anbar were the tribes, FRE, and the FF.²² A confederation of Sheikhs guided the tribes, and any COIN success in Al Anbar would have to include them in the solution. During the summer negotiations in Jordan, the Sheikhs and the FRE leadership demonstrated their impressive organization of the Sunni insurgency, as they had formed several committees that dealt with politics, economics, governance, military, security, and other important lines of operation.²³ The FRE leadership communicated its vision of Iraq to the Marines at the conference, who established their initial credibility by their willingness to listen the Sunni concerns. The rapport established in Amman cannot be underestimated, because it laid the crucial groundwork for further talks and negotiations with both the tribes and the FRE, which were essential for the build-up of trust between them and the Marines.

This trust became crucial in early 2006, when the tribes and FRE turned against AQI, largely as a result of the group's brutality and use of terrorism against the locals. Losing the initial battle with AQI, they contacted Colonel John C. Coleman, the former I MEF Chief of Staff who attended the 2004 Amman conference, to request military support.²⁴ Colonel Coleman was able to contact the I MEF Forward headquarters in Western Al Anbar, which provided the crucial military air support for the FRE and tribes against AQI fighters. That support was essentially "the tipping point for the Sunni Awakening, because that's when they reached out to the Marines and asked for help."²⁵

The Awakening movement encouraged enlistment in the IP, and CF grew and successfully deployed the IP across Al Anbar province using one of the lessons learned from the FB experiment, which was essentially to provide reassuring backup presence for the Iraqis. The

IP was “instrumental in separating the insurgents from the population, a central principle of effective COIN.”²⁶ Additionally, the 2007 U.S. troop surge in Iraq allowed CF to provide the necessary security for the Awakening movement to grow and defeat AQI beyond Al Anbar province and effectively throughout Iraq.

It is important to note that the Iraqi government became more willing to work with the Sunnis to redress some of their grievances after 2007. When the Awakening movement was formed, it became crucial to integrate some of their members into the ISF in order to legitimize them, and at the same time legitimize the ISF and the new Iraqi government in the eyes of the Sunnis. The trust established between the Marines and the FRE and tribal leadership during the FB experiment and the Amman conference greatly encouraged the Marines to lobby the new Iraqi government to change its view towards the Sunnis in Al Anbar province. Additionally, the Marines continuously pressed their higher headquarters and the new Iraqi government to allow greater Sunni participation in the political process and the reconstruction of Iraq, a fact that was positively viewed by the Sunni leadership and further strengthened their bonds of trust with the Marines.

Finally, the lessons learned from Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE and the FB experiment led to the successful application of COIN principles during the second assault on Fallujah in November 2004, dubbed Operation AL FAJR. In essence, I MEF was able to synchronize and integrate a successful IO campaign into its planning process, effectively integrate the ISF into the assault force, gain a better understanding of the local culture and political process, and establish a solid base of support for combat operations within the IIG and world opinion in advance of the operation. As such, early COIN efforts in the spring and

summer of 2004 fundamentally shaped follow-on coalition efforts, and its lessons learned contributed to a successful COIN outcome in Al Anbar province and Iraq.

Conclusion

Al Jazeera reporting shaped the story and image of Fallujah on the Arab street and the world stage during Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE. Additionally, the disunity of command contributed to the confusion and the dysfunction of both the CPA and CJTF-7, resulting in rash decision making based on emotions vice strategy. Consequently, the Sunnis perceived coalition resolve as weak and inept in the aftermath of the unilateral cease fire in April 2004, and the insurgency grew much stronger in the summer of 2004.

The creation of the FB was an important first step in the coalition reconciliation process with the Sunni Arabs despite its failure, as it demonstrated the willingness of the coalition to listen to and address Sunni concerns. It also provided the coalition a political respite to proceed with the 30 June transfer of sovereignty to the IIG, and allowed I MEF to disengage its forces from Fallujah in preparation for the subsequent assault in November. The follow-on negotiations with the Sunni insurgent leadership in Amman, Jordan, in the summer of 2004 further opened the lines of communication with the insurgency. The U.S. had a chance to end the Sunni insurgency early on in the summer of 2004; however the political environment in both the U.S. and Iraq made it impossible. The IIG was fiercely anti-Baathist, and the Shi'a and Kurds were not willing to make any concessions to the Sunnis. It took two more years of fighting and priceless sacrifices in blood, sweat, and money to convince both the Sunnis and the Americans to cooperate together against AQI. However, the seeds of trust between the Americans and the

Sunnis were laid back in the spring and summer of 2004, where both Marines and FRE worked together and formed bonds during the FB experiment, and the follow-on summer negotiations in Amman. In essence, “the awakening in Al Anbar effectively began on a hot summer night in Amman in 2004.”²⁷ Despite the early demise of these COIN efforts, these experiments had significant and lasting effects on the success of follow-on COIN efforts in Al Anbar province.

Endnotes

¹ Bing West. *No True Glory*. New York: Bantam Books, 2005, pp. 13.

² West, 14.

³ West, 21.

⁴ Otterman, Sharon. *Iraq: Debaathification*. Council on Foreign Relations, April 7 2005, pp. 2.

⁵ West, 28.

⁶ Thomas E. Ricks. *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 2006, pp. 311.

⁷ David J. Danelo, *Blood Stripes: The Grunt's View of the War in Iraq*. Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, PA, 2006, pp. 90.

⁸ Peter R. Mansoor. *Baghdad at Sunrise: A Brigade Commander's War in Iraq*. Yale University Press, 2008, pp. 278.

⁹ West, 158.

¹⁰ Lieutenant General Sanchez, Ricardo S. *Wiser in Battle: A Soldier's Story*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, May-June 2008, pp. 368.

¹¹ West, 192.

¹² Bremer, L. P., and M. McConnell. *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope*. Pocket Books, 2006, pp. 345.

¹³ FM 3-24.2 *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*. 2009. Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, DC, pp. 3-11.

¹⁴ FM 3-24.2, 3-11.

¹⁵ FM 3-24.2, 6-102.

¹⁶ Perry, Mark. *Talking to Terrorists: Why America must engage with its enemies*. New York:

Basic Books, 2010, pp. 56.

¹⁷ Perry, 56.

¹⁸ Perry, 57.

¹⁹ *Al Anbar Awakening, Volume I*, 67.

²⁰ *Al Anbar Awakening, Volume I*, 67.

²¹ *Al Anbar Awakening, Volume I*, 67.

²² *Al Anbar Awakening, Volume I, American Perspectives. U.S. Marines and Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009*. Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA, 2009, pp. 5.

²³ *Al Anbar Awakening, Volume I*, 66.

²⁴ *Al Anbar Awakening, Volume I*, 72.

²⁵ *Al Anbar Awakening, Volume I*, 72.

²⁶ *Al Anbar Awakening, Volume I*, 27.

²⁷ Perry, 88.

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Appendix A: Main Events and Fallujah Campaign Timeline

- April 2003: U.S. troops enter Fallujah.
- 28 April 2003: 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers mistakenly kill and injure dozens of Iraqi civilians in Fallujah, causing widespread resentment and subsequent attacks against U.S. forces.
- May 2003: Ambassador Bremer dissolves the Iraqi Army and issues De-Baathification orders.
- 2 November 2003: Fallujah insurgents shoot down a U.S. Army CH-47 helicopter that resulted in more than fifteen killed and twenty American wounded.
- 8 January 2004: Fallujah insurgents shoot down a U.S. Army Blackhawk Medevac helicopter, killing nine soldiers.
- 14 February 2004: Insurgents associated with AMZ assault the main police station in the city and killed twenty three policemen while freeing seventy five prisoners (Valentine's Day massacre).
- 31 March 2004: Insurgents and local mobs attack and mutilate four U.S. Blackwater contractors. Footage is broadcast all over the world.
- 2 April 2004: CJTF-7 issues the order to initiate offensive operations against Fallujah
- 3 April 2004: 2/1 and 1/5 establishes cordon and checkpoints around Fallujah
- 6 April 2004: I MEF launches the military assault on the city, dubbed Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE.
- 9 April 2004: CJTF-7 ordered I MEF to stop the assault on Fallujah
- 1 May 2004: I MEF units withdraw from Fallujah and turn over security to the FB.
- Summer 2004: Fallujah becomes a safe haven for insurgents and criminals.
- 19 July 2004: Insurgent leadership proposal to I MEF in Amman Jordan (The July Surprise).
- 7 November 2004: I MEF launches second assault on Fallujah, dubbed Operation AL FAJR (aka PHANTOM FURY).
- 16 November 2004: U.S. forces complete takeover of Fallujah with minor pockets of resistance remaining.
- 23 December 2004: Last pockets of resistance neutralized in Fallujah.
- 31 January 2005: Bulk of U.S. forces leaves Fallujah and turn over security to ISF.

Appendix B: Maps of Fallujah

Figure 1: Map of Iraq



Figure 2: Situation Map of Fallujah on 9 April 2004 during Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE

Source: London Times

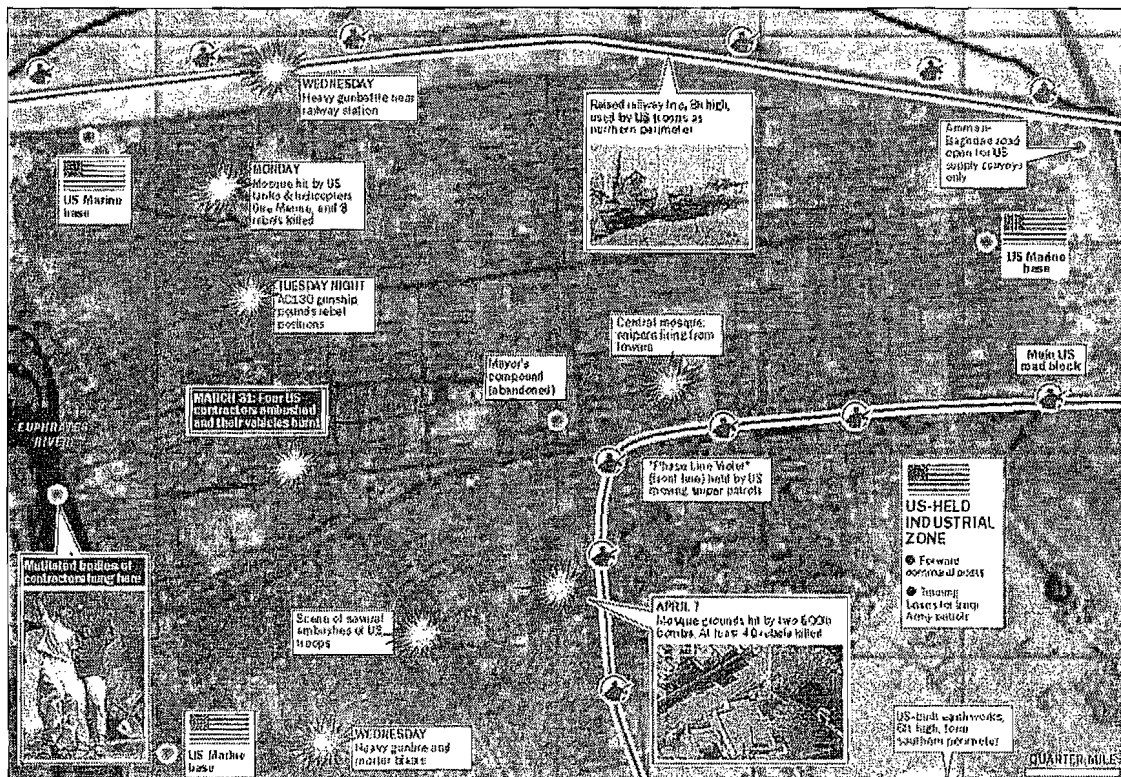
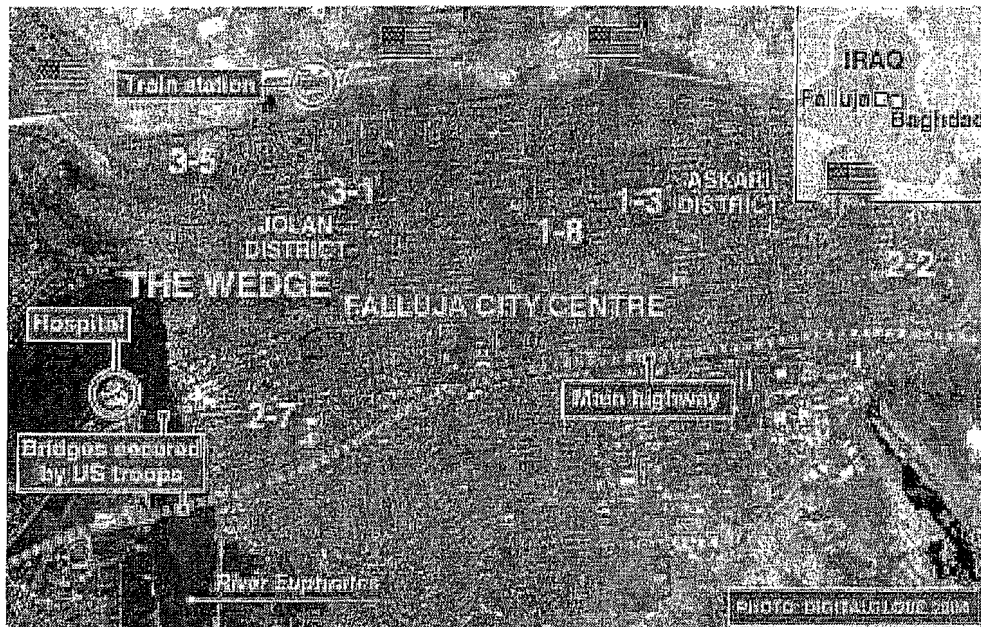


Figure 3: Situation Map of Fallujah on 9 November 2004 during Operation AL FAJR

Source: Digitalglobe.com



Situation map of Fallujah on the afternoon of November 9, 2004 - D+2 - when 3/1 followed the heavy tanks of the Army's 2nd of the 7th Cavalry into Fallujah.